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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000570

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: SECOND DAY OF MDC STAYAWAY A MAJOR SUCCESS

REF: A) HARARE 557 B) HARARE 546

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

ALMOST UNIVERSAL PARTICIPATION

11. (C) Approximately 80-90 percent of private urban businesses were closed nationwide on March 19, the second day of the national stayaway organized by the opposition MDC. In Harare, more than 90 percent of retail shops in the central business district were shuttered (significantly more than the 50 percent the day before), with 60 percent of the normally full parking spaces available. A 15-minute drive-around by police in the industrial areas revealed only one business open, and that one appeared to be operating at minimal capacity. In the northern, low-density suburbs where most Embassy families reside, most shops were closed. Most of the high-density suburbs around Harare were quiet today and public transportation from those areas into central Harare was largely unavailable. More than 40 percent of U.S. Mission FSN's (78/185) were not at work today and many of those who did appear left soon after noon, hoping the early departure would give them a head-start in securing scarce transport home.

12. (C) The stayaway gained momentum on the second day, when many more businesses around the country shut their doors. In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, the central business district was very quiet, as 80-90 percent of shops were closed. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic was very light in downtown Bulawayo, and very few commuter omnibuses were operating. Approximately half of businesses in the industrial area were again open, with most of those operating at minimal capacity. In the southern city of Masvingo, virtually every shop was closed, according to Mayor Alois Chaimiti. Some 90 percent of private businesses in the eastern city of Mutare were shut, an impressive increase over the 30 percent of the day before. MDC advisor Gandhi Mudzingwa, one of the key organizers of the stayaway, was pleased with the results on day two. He claimed that more than 80 percent of businesses were closed in every major urban center in Zimbabwe except Gweru, where he said MDC structures were "not well-grounded."

Relatively Little Violence

13. (C) There were reports of violence the evening of March 18 in the high-density suburbs of Kuwadzana, Dzivaresekwa, and Chitungwiza, involving both battles between rival groups of youths (in Kuwadzana) and beatings administered by police (in Dzivaresekwa and Chitungwiza). We heard unconfirmed reports of isolated incidents of stoning of cars and intimidation of those trying to get to work the morning of March 19.

Sympathy from security services?

14. (C) A drive by police through downtown Harare and several high-density suburbs (Tafara, Epworth, Warren Park, and Kuwadzana) revealed virtually no overt police presence. We understand from some sources that police concentrated their attention today on the high-density areas of Glenview, Budiro, and Chitungwiza. A military helicopter made a number of flights over Harare, with teargas canisters clearly visible underneath. MDC advisor Mudzingwa told us he was encouraged by two specific incidents on March 18 which he interpreted as sympathy for the MDC efforts by security force elements. In the first instance, Mudzingwa claimed that the burning of a bus in Chitungwiza was instigated by police. The police officers apparently approached a group of MDC youths, said they were fed up with what was happening in Zimbabwe, and promised not to arrest them if they burned a bus. Although wary at first, the youths proceeded to torch a bus, then ran away as the police officers stood by motionlessly. Then, in Chitungwiza the evening of March 18, soldiers made no attempt to stop MDC youths from burning another bus or to subsequently detain them.

Comment

15. (C) The two-day stayaway was a major success for the

MDC, which demonstrated its capacity to mobilize widespread support and paralyze Zimbabwe's economy. The party leadership decided against prolonging the stayaway out of concern for the effort's sustainability beyond the announced two days. We think this was a correct decision, particularly if the party was uncertain about the prospects for success, as the MDC can now declare victory and deploy a useful bargaining chip in its efforts to forge a sustainable resolution of Zimbabwe's political crisis. The opposition party must now find a way to build constructively on the political momentum of the last two days, including mobilizing the urban population to move from passive resistance to more activist, peaceful protest against the Mugabe regime.

SULLIVAN